

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

VOL. II. No. 5

SAN DIEGO, ALTA CALIFORNIA, OCTOBER 10, 2008

PRICE: FREE

Losing Your Marbles

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Archaeologists have recovered many kinds of artifacts from the Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel. Antique toys, in particular, speak volumes about the children who once owned them. Toy marbles, enjoyed by the children of Old Town for decades, have been found from different areas of the house.

Marble games, with various sets of rules, have been played by children around the world for more than two thousand years. Marbles in the 1800s could be made locally, or purchased of decorated porcelain, clay, or glass. Ceramic marbles were made by hand with two piece molds, and with the invention in Germany of the marble scissors in 1846, glass marbles were mass-produced and became accessible to everyone. By 1890 the first machines for making glass marbles were introduced.

Marbles have been found in al-

most every house in Old Town, which tells us that they were a very popular and accessible toy. One could play marbles alone, or in a group, and different games could be played such as enclosure games or hole games. One could have several target marbles, and a favorite marble to shoot with, called the "shooter." It was a special marble because of its color, design or size, and a child would avoid losing it at any cost. Marbles could be also shot from a sling shot. The child could also trade marbles, and they were often prized, cached possessions.

Iris Engstrand and Thomas Scharf in their article "Rancho Guajome, A California Legacy Preserved" (*The Journal of San Diego History*, 1974, Vol.20, No.1) note that Ysidora Bandini and Cave Coutts of Rancho Guajome had eight children. Once when Benjamin Hayes and his son Chauncey were visiting them at Guajome, Chauncey gave the Coutts kids "marbles of a dozen colors brought from Los Angeles" which they played with under the porch.

Archaeologists at the Cosmopolitan Hotel project have found 9 marbles: 8 made of painted ceramic with green and

red lines, and one made out of red glass. One can only imagine the way these marbles got to the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Perhaps Bandini's grandsons played with them and lost them in the garden; perhaps a family with children stayed at the Cosmo Hotel and brought them to amuse themselves.

The expression "You lost your marbles" didn't originally mean going crazy, it meant to become really, really angry. When you play certain marble games, if you are not a dexterous enough, your opponent can win all of your marbles. Your reaction will be to get angry because you lost.

